Four views on management fashions

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Four views on management fashions: … or the added value of old wine in new bottles.

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Abstract:
The last two decades, the knowledge field around management issues has shown a process of commercialisation. In this field, all kinds of new concepts are launched and demand attention. In fact, concepts such as BPR and TQM are often criticised for being fashionable. In this article, four different views on management fashions will be discussed and validated with empirical results. First of all, management concepts keep the management world busy by moving their attention between different extremes. The attention of managers swings like a pendulum from one extreme tot the next. Evidence is shown, by discussing diversification versus Core Competence strategies. Second, management concepts add something to the collective knowledge base of the management world. Different examples were given which prove this point. Third, management concepts are like `old wine in new bottles'. Some evidence was suggested. However, it is also discussed that this argument does not make these concepts less relevant. The added value should be judged at a collective level, not on an individual one. Finally, attention was given to the view that concepts are mere nonsense. Some examples have been presented. The article concludes with the remark that each of the visions might be valid in its own right, but that validity of the argument is strongly determined by the social context in which it was made. The usefulness of the concepts is hard to judge based purely on their inherent qualities. Much of their qualities lie in the use of the concepts, not in the concepts themself. And finally, their value should not be underestimated in terms of their potential role in keeping the collective knowledge base around management issues alive.

1. Introduction[1].

The last decade, the Dutch management world was flooded with the concepts Learning Organisation and the more recent Knowledge Management. After the publication of the Dutch translation of Peter Senge's `The Fifth Discipline' (1990) in 1992, a wave of attention emerged in the management community. The original book was soon supported with 'The Fifth Discipline Handbook' which promised that managers could apply the concept in their organization even without the help of consultants.

This sequence of events is not at all unique for the concept of the Learning organization or for the Netherlands. In other countries, the situation was probably the same. The books were translated in French, Turkish, Spanish, Norwegian, Swedish, German, Korean, and Slowakian so on[2]. And there are many more of these. Core Competence, Business Process Reengineering and Total Quality Management are just a few examples of management concepts that have been popular in the networks of managers for a short period of time. This permanent impermanence of new concepts in the management world is increasingly attracting attention. On the one hand, we see the business press and management journalist covering this issue (for example Micklethwait and Wooldridge 1996). On the other hand, we see an increasing stream coming from the scientific corner of the field (for example Eccles and Nohria 1992, Hilmer and Donaldson 1996). This fashion aspect in management thought starts to become more and more visible and turns into an object itself. In short, management fashion is hot.

The growing attention for these temporary management concepts has led to an increasing understanding in for instance the role of the consultancy firms and business schools, the growing commercialization, the emergence of management gurus, and so on. Especially the role of consultancy firms is seen as relevant in this respect. In many cases, they are the source and distributor of management concepts and profile themselves often as the suppliers of the newest management ideas. But in spite of all the attention to management fashions, hardly anybody is paying systematic attention to the question what the yield in terms of knowledge of all these waves of temporary management concepts actually is. Regarding this question, many authors express implicit or explicit ad hoc thoughts. Unfortunately, any further grounding of their statements and conjectures are often painfully absent or rather one-dimensional. Due to this situation, management concepts turned into one of the most controversial elements of the temporary management world. The added value of the fashionable management concepts to the existing body of management knowledge is part of an hidden discourse which contains a number of views.

An important source of this variety in views on the added value of management concepts is the extremely oversimplified statements of many authors. In this article, I would like to work out the underlying discussion in more detail in an attempt to refocus the discussion. And that is about time. All kinds of extreme statements of people involved, might have a very nice purpose when profiling themselves to others in the field, though it doesn't help the discourse around this issue one step further. In the following pages, I will first explore the field around the emergence, spread and disappearance of these fashionable concepts in more detail. This introduction gives some basic terminology which is relevant in order to study the added value of management concepts.

Subsequently, I will elaborate on the four different views on the recurring waves of management concepts that can be traced within discourse around management issues. This part will be illustrated with some primary data of 40 expert interviews we conducted in 1998 (Karsten and van Veen 1998) and some secundary data by presenting material from other studies. Finally, I will present a theory which encompasses the whole field and makes it possible to understand why these different views can exist side by side for such a long time.

2. Fashionable management concepts: a first glance at the field.

The coming and going of fashionable management concepts became really obvious from the beginning of the nineteen nineties, because the number of concepts seemed to increase. Their impermanence seemed to become permanent. Pascale (1990) was one of the first to focus on this issue and created a popularity Figure with all concepts since World War II. His figure suggests an increase in number of new management concepts in the management community. It also became clear that a number of these concepts disappear after a few successful years[3]. Management concepts seem to be fashionable and links with clothing, haute cuisine and music are often suggested (Abrahamson 1996, Ten Bos 2000). Pascale was quickly followed by others, such as Eccles and Nohria (1992) who wrote a classic with the appealing title: *Beyond the Hype*. The problem which was broad to the forefront was the issue of sense and non sense, or added value if you will, of these management concepts. Management concepts were subsequently portayed as relatively simplistic prescriptions for managers on the necessary steps to take to solve relevant organizational problems (Kieser 1997). These management concepts are recognizable because they usually have an appealing title, a problem formulation, an indication of a solution and, of course, a number of successful examples to convince the concept's consumer (see also Karsten and Van Veen 1998). For instance *Business Process Reengineering* claims that companies are often inefficient due to the fact that they contain outdated organizational structures. Fortunately this `problem' can be solved by redesigning these structures and by introducing more contemporary variations which are grounded in the use of information technology. As a result, the fashion following manager who focusses on BPR will soon be a member of the hall of fame in which we also find companies such as Hallmark, Taco Bell, Capital Holding and Bell Atlantic to mention a few (Hammer and Champy 1993).

The increasing number of management concepts raises questions around the source of this permanent impermanence. The rise of the numbers of new concepts can be traced to the bankruptcy of parts of the management sciences (compare Locke 1996, Van Baalen 2000). Since the nineteen twenties, managers as a societal group had made a new step in their professionalisation process by establishing their own `science' at the universities. In the United States, this resulted in the establishment of business schools which resulted in the growth of the MBA education. Since that period, both managers and management sciences were strongly oriented on the systematic development of companies. Complicated models with all kind of future estimates were developed and translated into long-range plans. For decades, these long-range plans were the leading instruments to manage large centralized corporations. Especially after World War 2 up till the nineteen seventies, management was just like politics based on the assumptions of the possibilities to actually manage companies and societies.

Management was a scientific endeavor and sound reasoning and planning would lead to the best results.

In the early nineteen eighties, this situation suddenly ended. The quick rise of Japanese firms on markets where US firms dominated for decades, caused a paradigm shift in management thinking. *In Search of Excellence* of Peters and Waterman (1982) is probably the book in which the shift is most visible. Suddenly, leadership, culture and other softer elements of managerial issues became central. Detailed and intellectually sound management models seemed insufficient for managing companies into the future. As a result, scientific knowledge around management issues entered a crisis of legitimacy with the final result that it lost its primacy on the field of management issues. This process was stimulated in countries such as the Netherlands due to the fact that the government started to reduce its role as a central actor in the distribution networks in the knowledge community (Karsten and Van Veen 2000). More and more, the responsibility for development and distribution of management knowledge was pushed to a situation in which market related forces were guiding the developments. And as a consequence, the way was open for anybody who wanted to claim some kind of new insight in management issues.

Among the managers in the knowledge community, a large confusion emerged about the way to go. Science seemed not very helpful at this point and the resulting gap was quickly filled with consultancy firms and management gurus such as Peters, Moss-Kanter and so on. Publishers discovered this market full of willing and rich consumers and quickly entered the field with series of new publications in which all kinds of new concepts were presented. Both the consultancy firms and the publishing market grew very quickly and developed their own dynamics (see Crainer 1997). The stream of management concept got into its stride and as a result, it transformed the appearance and dynamics in the collective knowledge base on management issues. The commercialization of management knowledge meant that this collective knowledge base, at first the exclusive domain of science, was more and more subject to the dynamics of the market. Not the content, but the acceptability became an important criterion when developing and spreading knowledge. Every thought which might lead to some kind of profitable sales within a certain small market niche with interested buyers, was launched and led to a continuing avalanche of publications. Scientific reasoning and procedures, in which developing arguments based on logic and the critical and empirical testing of new thoughts are central, seemed to have disappeared in favor of sale figures and profit margins. Form seems to beat content in an attempt to satisfy the `average' manager and to increase the army of potential interested consumers. Partly based on similar observations, the Belgium Professor Buelens concluded that *...it is hard to suppress some feelings of depression*' (1997 p.17).

3. Different opinions on fashionable management concepts:

In this context, the question forces upon the knowledge community what the (non)sense of new management concepts actually is. This question is easy to ask, though difficult to answer. However, based on an extensive literature study and 40 interviews with well known Dutch CEO's, scientists and consultants, four different views can be distinguished within the present knowledge community (Karsten and Van Veen 1998). Each of these views differs in its consequences for the effects of management fashions in the collective knowledge base of the knowledge community around management issues. As will turn out, for each of these views, some sound arguments can be found to corroborate the statements but the situation in which they seem to be valid is largely based on the context in which they are used. The four different views are:

- **The accumulation movement or `getting smarter':** According to this view, the stream of new management concepts reflects the learning process of the knowledge community over the years. One can speak of an evolution process in the collective knowledge base: new insights are added with each new concept. Management knowledge that is developed is spread in the community by means of a fashionable management concept and is transferred in this way from one organization to the other. According to this view, management concepts are a crucial element in the contemporary knowledge community which shows progress by developing and spreading more and better knowledge.
- **The pendulum movement or `going back and forth':** According to this view, contemporary managers handle their problems based on the management concepts. However, when applying the present concepts, they simultaneously create the management problems of tomorrow. Or to put it vice versa: new concepts find their source and legitimacy in the negative consequences of earlier concepts. As a result of this problem generating ability of new concepts, the collective knowledge base develops a dynamic character. In an extreme form, the knowledge base moves like a pendulum between a few ultimate poles. As a result, different concepts that are popular in different periods can oppose each other diametrically.
- **The circular movement or `old wine in new bottles':** This view can be found in many critical newspaper/magazine articles and

popular management books. In this line of argument, there is no progress at all. Existing management knowledge is recycled by giving it a new appearance and subsequently sold again as a new solution to contemporary managerial problems.

• **The lack of movement or `hot air':** According to this view, management concepts do not add anything to existing management practices. It is beautiful rhetoric of consultants and management gurus without any relationship with the everyday practices. A very negative view indeed.

Let us have a more detailed look at the four different views and see what we can find to verify them.

4. Accumulation movement or `getting smarter'.

This view on management concepts is wide spread in the group of what Abrahamson calls the fashion setters (Abrahamson 1996). Especially consultants and gurus develop arguments which suggest that new waves of management concepts are a positive development because new concepts add new insights to the collective knowledge base on management issues. These groups portray the waves of concepts as a process in which knowledge accumulates: every new concept means one step higher forward and has positive effects on the performance of organizations.

This point of view is especially popular among people who connect their personal reputation to one specific management concept. They often claim that their new concept is a (big) step forward for the management community. These authors use the concept in order to describe a certain kind of management problem and subsequently offer a possible solution to solve this problem. It speaks for itself that most concepts, implicitly or explicitly, suggest that their contribution is unique and will lead to better results. Hammer and Champy, the gurus of Business Process Reengineering, distance themselves for example from every suggestion in that direction. They wrote literally: '*Reengineering is not a fad, because it works. Properly applied it delivers what it promises*' (1995 pp.215-216). However, their claim that a new concept adds something to the collective knowledge base is not really trustworthy given that it is the only legitimization they have for their ideas. From a distance, however, a few other examples can be found which do give a more systematic argument in favor of this opinion. Let us have a look at two of them.

- **Example 1: developments in quality thinking.**

More interesting is the claim of knowledge accumulation when it comes from a less suspect source. Probably the most well-developed contribution in this area was developed by Cole, an American professor and advisor who works in the area of Quality Management for years. Cole acknowledges in his book (1999) that the American management community was flooded since World War 2 with all kinds of new quality concepts and that these concepts often had a fashionable character because they disappeared quickly from the public scene[4]. He also admits that the sequence of quality concepts might lead to a lack of accumulation of knowledge and of learning capacity in specific contexts. These concepts catch only temporary attention but do not leave any long term traces in the company. Besides this, his main thesis is that American management community learned from this sequence of 'mini-fashions'. According to him, the concrete quality differences in Japanese and American products were the original reason for manager to start focussing on quality issues. In this context, sequences of mini-fashions emerged. Each of these mini-fashions can be criticized for being fashionable and thus uninteresting. However, the total sequence of mini-fashions did have overall positive effects, according to Cole. The end result is a long list of quality concepts that flooded the American management community. In doing this, the community learned new practices which over the years accumulated in the collective knowledge base.

- Example 2: The rise of corporate culture as a concept.

A second and beautiful example of the accumulation argument can traced in the emergence of the concept of corporate culture. In the seventies, a group of reseachers and a disconnected group of consultants/practitioners already focussed on cultural issues in management but only on a small scale. According to these groups, rational strategies were not enough to run a company and more attention should be paid to ideas, norms, values and symbolic aspects of management. Partly due to the success of Japan in the seventies and eighties, which were often attributed to cultural differences, a large interest in cultural issues emerged quickly in the knowledge community. The performance gap between the two countries was easy to see and started to have large effects on American companies. At that point in time three best-sellers played a large role in the upsurge of interest in culture in knowledge community in the United States: Ouchi's (1981) *Theory Z*, Peters and Waterman's (1982) *In Search of Excellence* and Deal and Kennedy's (1982) *Corporate Cultures.* What started small in a group of scientists and a group of consultants/practitioners grew out quickly to a very popular management concept (Barley, Meyer and Gash 1988).

The relation between corporate culture and organizational performance was both studied within corporations as well as on a national level. The sudden increase in attention is, at least partly, due to the economic recession that hit the US in the beginning of the eighties. This recession fuelled discussions around the differences in managing with Japan. Journals, magazines and books were filled with this topic and large numbers of managers traveled to Japan in order to study the art of Japanese management. On the one hand, this led to the development of concept of Total Quality Management and a lot of attention to quality issues. On the other hand and at least as important was the legendary Japanese commitment to their organization. This high commitment led to all kinds of cooperation between Japanese employees and manager. For US managers with their tradition of distrust in employment relations, these forms were of a nature of which they could only dream of. In this context, corporate culture turned into an important new concept in management thinking.

A second breeding ground for corporate culture was the large wave of mergers in the sixties and seventies which was mainly induced by economic motives. However, these mergers encountered many problems and sometimes it went completely wrong such as in the case of merger between the Dutch and German steel companies Hoogovens and Hoesch in 1973. The cause for the disaster were not so much bad company results or a wrong analysis of the economic possibilities of the merger. One of the main reasons can be found in different and incompatible visions and work methods of the members of the two former corporations. An interviewed CEO mentioned in a similar context about the corporate culture in this period: ‘Corporate culture wasn’t soft. It turned out that it was hard as a rock’.

Merger attempts were failing due to cultural factors and were often accompanied with high split up costs. Attention to cultural factors in earlier stages of the merger process would have made the avoidance of problems possible. As a result, corporate culture as a management concept developed itself into a standard element of management thinking. All kinds of specialists devoted their time in order to understand the essential elements of corporate culture. Nowadays, there is hardly any merger announced without a remark that the responsible managers did not see any problems in term of the differences of the corporate cultures. Or vice versa, the planned merger between KPMG and Moret, Ernst & Young in 1998 was withdrawn based on cultural differences between accountants and consultants.

So we can conclude that the concept of Corporate Culture is a useful term in the modern management language because it defines problems that up till than did not get a lot attention. Corporate culture added something substantial to the collective knowledge base and it would be hard to argue that this concept is only a temporary fashion.

- Example 3: Accumulation of concepts in daily practice.

How Cole’s mini-fashions could lead to the accumulation in the collective knowledge base can also be traced in organizational practice. Besides the ideas of consultants and scientists, the idea of accumulation also fits with practical experiences of managers. An interviewed Dutch HRM-manager gave an impression of the conditions which are necessary in order to introduce teams based on a Socio-technical approach. The corporation for which this interviewee worked, was rather functional organized with centralized decision making structure. When the company started decentralizing, the conditions were developed for the introduction of teams. The interviewee told:

> *'Some time ago, if you worked at the Production site, then you only did production, if you worked with Transport, then you rode on a forklift and the quality inspector was part of the quality department. But if they have all their bosses again how can you ever start thinking about one team in the operations? First, everybody need to be working under the same hierarchical chef. Then you might start thinking about teams, and not one moment earlier'.*

The interviewee suggests here that organizations should be more or less `ready' before a certain concept can be useful. As a result, it might be true that new concepts can not be introduced just about anywhere. There might be a number of conditions that should be met before a successful implementation can be realized. This leads to the conclusion that by using management concepts, certain effects will be accumulated in the collective knowledge base that makes that organizations start to operate more efficiently. Essentially, this implies a learning process in which the fashionable management concepts operate as carriers of knowledge.

5. The pendulum or `going back and forth': management concepts compensate historical mistakes.

In the pendulum argument, fashionable management concepts are also taken seriously. In fact, the source of this argument is based on the thought that concepts will be implemented in order to solve existing problems in organizations. Any serious attempt of a manager or a management team will move the organization away from the experienced problems, similar to the accumulation view. However, the sequence of concepts does not lead to progress but has a neutral, if not adverse effect.

Although essentially every single management concept is based on this thought, the pendulum argument goes one step further and focusses on the sequences of management concepts. The argument contains an underlying assumption that organizations are problematic by definition and that solving one problem with a concept will generate the next problem. A weaker variant suggests that coordination problems are unsolvable by definition. Whichever solution one might chose, it definitely has some disadvantages which will (re)appear (see also Abrahamson 1996).

As a result, managing is an eternal quest for an optimum solution that does not exist. Goshal and Mintzberg (1994 p.8) notice about this: '*Organizations swing like a pendulum, and never seem to get it right'.* Kor Grit, a Dutch scholar of municipality organizations, also notices a similar mechanism when he discusses their organizational structures: '*A specific discourse* (read management concept, KvV) *might be helpful in solving a specific set of problems, but it generates other problems at the same time. An economic discourse is for instance useful in order to increase the service to civilians (clients) but is less useful when one wants to address the civilian as a participant* (2000 p.13). As a result, the application of one concept creates new problems which again create an ideal breeding ground for the next management concept.

A stronger variant of the argument suggests, in its most stylized version, that management concepts solve the problems of situation A by pushing the organization towards situation B. After a while, the problems of situation B appear at the surface which creates the breeding ground for a new concept which solves the problems in situation B by pushing the organization back to A. hence, the old problems of situation A will reemerge. Over time, managers try to solve everyday problems and in doing this they run back and forth between the extremes of a continuum. The result of his behavior is that the collective knowledge base is permanently on the move and seems to be very dynamic. But in the end, it is only more of the same. To make this view on (non)sense of management fashion more plausible, let me present a few examples of this process.

- Example 1: Diversification and Core Competencies.

A beautiful illustration of the pendulum can be found in the prescriptive concepts around investment decisions. In this area of strategic management, two different extremes of a continuum can be observed that each have their pro's and cons that clearly exclude each other in practice. The Core Competencies of Hamel and Prahalad (1994) is a well known concept in the management world and contains one of the extremes. The idea behind the concept is, roughly, that companies should focus on the activities they are good in and leave the rest for others. Many of the strategic decisions in companies in the nineteen nineties have been legitimized with a referal to these arguments. Nowadays, the idea behind Core Competence is almost a norm in the Western management community[5].

But taking the rationality of a concept at their face value is often misleading. There is more to it, also in this situation. Core Competencies are not the answer to all problems. It turns out that focussing on Core Competencies increases a number of other risks for which companies were rather hesitant in the decades before the nineties. Even worse, the opposite concept was quite popular in the knowledge community in the nineteen sixties and seventies: they called it Diversification. According to the Diversfication concept, the risks related to the operation on a small number of markets should be reduced because it was considered to be dangereous. In this period, companies were often advised to extend their activities to other, often not related, markets. The rationale behind this was that is reduces the vulnerability for revolutionary shifts in the market of origin. And it turned out to be a quite succesful strategy. In the nineteen sixties and seventies, many Dutch companies went bankrupt at an astonishing rate due to the increasing competition of low wage countries. Diversification turned out to be quite a successful strategy. A chemical company as DSM wouldn't have survived the shut down of the Dutch State Mines if it hadn't followed a diversification strategy. The old mining activities had been evaporated in a few years but its diversified investments in the production of chemical products saved the company itself for bankruptcy. As a result, it is operating now in a totally different environment. With hindsight, a focus on Core Competencies would have been disastrous in that period.

So we observe that what is a legitimate strategy in the management world can be diametrically opposed to earlier periods and as a result, the opinions in the board rooms commute from one extreme to the other, back and forth. Just like a pendulum. Based on this argument, it is a small subsequent step to predict that with the Core Competencies the extreme of the contiunuum will be reached soon. Hence, companies will start to (re)develop activities in new areas in which they were not active up till then. The call for diversification with its focus on risk spreading can probably be heard once the concentration on a small base of Core Competencies will result in the first troubels. The first signs are already there. The multinational ABN-AMRO recently decided to keep its leasing activities after a period in which they had serious plans to sell them due to the fact that they were no core-activities[6]. So the pendulum might be on its way back to the other extreme.

Hamel and Prahalad saw this kind of critique coming in their publications around Core Competencies and defended themselves by drawing the discussion I presented here into a dialectical scheme. According to them, *diversification* is the thesis, *core business* the antithesis and their own *Core Competence* the synthesis. Although this can be seen as a smart rhetorical trick, it does not weaken the idea of a pendulum itself. It is impossible to think of an objective criterion which shows if a company reached its optimum or is perfectly concentrate on its Core Competencies. Companies will always commute around the right position and will sometimes be a little too much focused on the core business and will sometimes be a little too diversified (Hamel and Prahalad 1994 pp. 321-323)[7].

- Example 2: Problems related to the internal coordination.

A similar kind of pendulum movement can be observed in the discussions around the most optimal coordination structures in large companies. The functional structures of the nineteen fifties and sixties created coordination problems due to the fact that all specialized knowledge was buried in staff departments and the production was concentrated in separate units. This caused all kinds of coordination problems due to the fact that actual problems were treated in a fragmented way in all these departments. Strong tendencies to formalize decision making also made that many organizational problems were redirected to higher regions of the hierarchy. As a result, the functional structure generated problems and managers started searching for different solutions.

The alternative seemed to be to redistribute the responsibilities in the structure by applying a new guiding principle of organizational design. In this situation, the concept of the matrix structure was developed which was supposed to solve the problems of the functional structure. Members of the organizations were supposed to be accountable to different superiors for different issues. This management concept was received enthusiastically in the nineteen seventies. For instance, L.Helfrich, CEO of Shell in these days, described the advantages of the matrix as follows: ‘People distrust shared responsibility, a system in which one has more than one boss. But this is rather curious because we are raised from cradle to adulthood by two bosses: a father and a mother. And after this long, sometimes painful or rich experience of individual conflict, of learning to play in this triangle, of the synergy of the family bonds, one steps into a company were suddenly one boss is the only soul-saving alternative. What a loss of know how and experience about operating in teams. According to me, the matrix organization offers the possibility to preserve the central management in terms of goal setting, policy and control and simultaneously confront the temporary complex society and markets in a setting which stimulates creativity and flexibility, team and company’ [8] (1997 p.72).

Helfrichs arguments are a clear example of the enthusiasm which accompanied the concept of matrix structure in those days. Large numbers of companies have experimented with the concept. However, the reality within organizations turned out to be more stubborn than originally expected. The fact that matrix structures also generated all kinds of unexpected and negative outcomes can be clearly illustrated in the case of Fokker.

Fokker was an old air plane construction company. After an existence of 78 years, the company went bankrupt in 1997, partly due to an unfortunate take-over by Daimler Benz/DASA. After the bankruptcy, an enquiry was started and the results were published in *A study to the causes of the bankruptcy of Fokker* (1997). This report contains some beautiful observations of the negative results of matrices. Fokker introduced the matrix structure in 1979-1981. The results were not an unqualified success. As the report shows: `the organization was … characterized by the introduction of the job of program managers who were responsible for a total airplane program, such as the F27/F28 and later the Fo50/Fo100. This job stood square on the functional organization and resulted in a matrix organization. Originally (1981-1988), the program leader played a role in coordinating important activities that covered more functional areas with a responsibility to realize strategic planning. (...) The program director had a small staff bureau. (...) For information and further assistance, the program director was totally dependent on line managers and other departments. The relationship between the program director and line management was unclear and not well developed. In a formal sense, the program directors had a responsibility which they could fulfil. However, failing line managers could hide behind the responsibilities of the program directors. Due to the fact that program directors had no authority over line managers, a tension emerged between the functional and the program organization. Within the company, program directors were jokingly addressed as the Generals without an army (Deterink et. al 1997).

And within Philips, the Dutch multinational, the experiences with a matrix organization were not much better. Within the organizational design of Philips, the principles of the matrix organization played a large role. One of the most famous remarks of Boonstra, CEO of Philips at the end of the nineteen nineties, points at his irritations around the existing organizational design of Philips. 'Philips is just like a plate with spaghetti, an inextricable jumble; personally, a prefer to see a plate with asparagus, neatly and well-organized in close order' (Metze 1997). Managers started to search to organizational forms in which flexibility and efficiency could be combined. In this context, the concept of Business Units emerged in which management thinking about hierarchical relations redefined itself. Staff departments were outsourced or decentralized to the level of the Business Units.

The development from functional to matrix structures and finally to Business Units is probably not a pendulum with two clear extremes. It does however show a permanent coordination problem which generates continuing managerial debates and renewal in the area of management concepts over and over again. The need for an ultimate organizational form seems to be the source of inspiration for many organizational change processes which are supported enthusiastically by consultants. But every solution seems to generate new problems that subsequently demand new management concepts which suggest that these problems can be solved. If you chose the right concept and apply it in the right way, of course. As a result, the collective knowledge base is in a endless flux in which sequences of new management concepts are launched.

Overlooking these examples, it seems that there are forces within the collective knowledge base in which different concepts push and pull managers in different directions in different periods of time. Pushing management in period A to one direction seems to generate problems. To solve these emerging problems new management concepts will be developed to push management back in the other direction. The result is an endless flux in management thinking and activities. This rather dark picture is clearly favorable for consultants and others who live of organizational changes, but simultaneously, it leaves a long term trail of spilled energy and lost resources. The stream of new concepts does not lead to progress and in this line of argument, it might even damage the results of the company. This pendulum movement denies progress in the collective knowledge base. Managers are only busy in solving the problems created by other managers in earlier periods of time. As a collective, management does not learn and any accumulation of knowledge is hard to find.

6. Circular movement or `old wine in new bottles':

At least as popular as the accumulation view, is the idea that the permanent coming and going of fashionable concepts does not reflect progress. In fact, it is often portayed as a matter of old wine in new bottles. The labels of concepts change every now and than, but the content is quite stable. Over and over again, old wisdom is reformulated and brought to the market under the pretext of a step forwards. The flux in the knowledge base is only a dynamic in the management language. In interviews with managers and consultants, the view that there is nothing new under the sun is often heard. Penning's (1997) treatment of `old wine in new barrels' is a beautiful example. He shows how the ideas around learning in organizations are alrady present in when the Experience Curve was discovered by air plane constructors in 1931.

The question remains than why new concepts are launched over and over again? Or even better, how is it possible that managers still pay attention to these new concepts? What makes them interested time and time again? In order to answer this question, a closer look at the added value of management concepts on a personal level is necessary. So what can concepts mean for managers? A closer look learns that concepts are often interesting for managers when the new concept is capable of redefining a pressing organizational issue or to combine it with other urgent matters. The added value of this concept lies for instance in the capacity to connect changing issues in different way or the way it combines different management issues together. It is the cognitive potential to reinterpret or `reframe' the situation in which managers find themselves which makes them interesting. The next quotation from an interview with a high ranking manager is illustrative in this context:

> '*When I look what is meant under Business Process Reengineering, I see something which has existed for a long time. Before BPR, we had an internal Business Process Management Method. We looked carefully to processes and this was all very structured with all kinds of interview lists and so on. The biggest difference is however that BPR claims that is you have to throw away everything you do now in a very radical way and that you have to search for ways to do things much faster and better. So the difference is that you are not looking for a 10% increase, but that you search for ways to do it 600% faster'.*

This interviewed manager shows that in his definition of management, the permanent study of business processes is a normal activity one can expect from managers when running a company. For him this aspect of BPR is not new at all. Redefining business processes is a normal management task, although not all managers might be focussed on this. It is especially the way in which Business Process Reengineering appeals for revolutionary change trajectories that gives the concept added value. However, revolutionary change is also not new by itself. One of the slogans in nineteen eighties of management guru Tom Peters (1987) was: `Thriving on chaos, a handbook for management revolution'. So it is the combination of management issues that might change, but the issues themselves, such as redesigning business processes or revolutionary change, are in fact timeless. An interviewed consultant takes this one step further:

> *'In the nineteen fifties there was a large demand for craftsmanship. In that period we claimed that you should not organize, but also educate. In one year, I studied over 100 professions with the question how you can open up the experience which lies underneath. Nowadays, we call this experience tacit knowledge. And if you read a book on knowledge management, then you will find the same issues again. You just start talking again on tacit knowledge, how important it is and that is a major factor in Knowledge management.*

An interviewed professor goes one step further and concludes in this context:

> *'A lot of these principles in the area around people and organizations are in fact as old as humanity. So if someone claims that something is totally new, he is an ordinary crook'.*

The ultimate consequence of this view is that everything managers should know about management and organizations is already invented. If managers study the history of their profession in more detail, they will be more aware of the content of the collective knowledge base and they will not be the victims of these tricks anymore. The opportunities of new concepts are the result of the lack of knowledge of managers about the content and the history of their profession. Having more knowledge on these issues would reduce the demand for new concepts considerably.

So the fact that people observe old-wines-in-new-bottles is closely related that a number of themes that seem to reemerge over and over again. In a sense, one could theorize that *management* as a profession has an *abstract management agenda* that contains a list of standard issues. The number and kind of issues is stable, but the position on this imaginary agenda is not. The rise and fall on the agenda over time or are combined with other issues in different ways. In one period, quality is the issue, in another business processes which are subsequently changed for knowledge related issues. So on this permanent management agenda, the issues shift and are stressed in different ways in different periods, but their total number is limited and remains the same.

With this theoretical framework in hand, it is quite easy to explain shifts in themes over time. Circumstances under which management operates are changing. As a result, the management knowledge that is present has to be shifted to ever changing contexts. In the end, much of the new knowledge might not be totally new, but it might be relevant again due to the changing situation in which managers operate.

And here we encounter an important phenomenon which is never acknowledged in the discourse on the permanent impermanence of management concepts. The claim that it is all `old-wine-in-new-bottles', (s)he communicates two things in stead of one.

In the first place, it makes clear that someone in the past did come up with a certain idea and communicated this to other people (for instance in a book or an article). This is basically the source of the old-wine-in new-bottles argument as it is usually suggested. In the second place, the use of the phrase suggests that the person who observes old-wine-in-new-bottles is actually aware of the fact that someone in the past did already have this idea. In other words, the only person who can make the argument is someone who (a) has knowledge of the latest management concept and (b) has knowledge from that part of the collective knowledge base were the earlier version of the same argument can be found. Only if these two conditions hold, a person can draw the conclusion. To give an example, the idea behind the Learning Organization was rather new for me, but not for Pennings who was aware of the earlier developments around Experience Curve in the nineteen thirties of the last century. For him, it was old-wine-in-new-bottles. For me, it had added value.

So we are stuck with the question about what we learn when somebody uses the old-wine-in-new-bottles argument. Does it tell us something about the `newness' of the management concept? Or is it telling us something about the person who is making the argument itself? Or maybe we should reformulate it: maybe it is more important to evaluate the added value of a new management concept on the basis of the number of managers who did not know the underlying ideas and learn something from it compared to knowing that there is one person somewhere who already new it? The relative newness – measured in the number of new people who are confronted with an idea- might be much more important than the absolute newness for the collective knowledge base as a whole in which the only criterion is if there is one person who knows that another person in history had a similar idea. A retired manager described this in a beautiful way in an interview on this topic:

> *`There is of course an important part of old wine in those concepts. But if you don't put old wine in new bottles, then a large part of this will remain hidden. It is not used at all and that is not good either. It is just a method of bundling old experiences and that occurs under a new label. In fact, you could say that the suggestion that it is old-wine-in-new-bottles is the really dangerous idea. It stimulates the tendency to dispose management concepts totally. And that is a situation which you do not want at all.*

So the permanent impermanence of new management concepts can also be seen as a means to spread certain ideas and to keep them alive in the collective knowledge base which consists largely of a rather heterogeneous group of managers with very different backgrounds. Only by recycling old ideas and by making different existing themes, the present knowledge in collective knowledge base might be communicated over and over again. In this situation, experienced managers will start to discuss new management concepts as old-wine-in-new-bottles. However, for new entrants in the management scene the new concepts might be an eye-opener and rather valuable[9].

Even stronger, the stream of fashionable management concepts and other management publications might be the most important means to regenerate knowledge in a `profession' that has no real entrance barriers. In fact, every one can define him/herself a manager. A business card can be made in a few minutes. This is in sharp contrast with the acknowledged professions, such as the medical one. These professions use the mastering of the collective knowledge base as a criterion for entrance in the profession and protect the collective knowledge base itself against extinction by forcing newcomers to study the content (often by heart). The impossibility to develop a similar strategy for the management community introduces the possibility for other knowledge spreading mechanisms besides learning at school. And here we can see possibilities for fashionable concepts. The existing demand for knowledge in whatever form, is happily met by all kinds of commercial organizations by supplying personal advice, training, books, magazines, seminars, tapes and so on (compare Abrahamson 1996).

7. Lack of movement or `hot air':

The fourth and last views on management concepts consists of the hot-air hypothesis which has a number of versions. Of the four views on management concepts, this is definitely the most amusing one. Advocates of this view usually propagate their conviction with a great deal of enthusiasm and don't hesitate to use rather firm language. This firm language can be heard from two different directions.

In the first place, we see that managers themselves ridicule the stream of management concepts. Sometimes this makes them very angry. Within the target audience of the concepts, there is a sub group of managers that tries to stay as far away as possible from fashionable concepts and anything connected to it. Especially Harold Geneen, former CEO of ITT, opens in his latest book, that he wrote with Brent Bowers, a frontal attack on the concepts that keep managers from the real important issues. Even the title of this book is rather revealing: *Synergy and other Lies: Downsizing, Bureaucracy and Corporate Culture debunked* (1997).

In this book you can find phrases as: '*…baloney is baloney. And there is a lot today… there is no secret, no magic formula. There are just the old fashioned virtues of hard-work, honesty, and risk taking. ... it is important not to succumb to the latest management fad. Because fads tend to contain a lot of – you guessed it- baloney*' (p. xii). But that is just the appetizer. They focus their attention on the concept of *Synergy* and write `*... one thing I won't defend on any grounds is a carcinogenic slice of baloney called "synergy", the most screwball buzz-word of the last decade. It has a phony sound to it. Say it out loud. Don't you feel a little embarrassed? Yet, it has become almost obligatory to trot it out to describe the wonderful future of a corporate merger or the brilliance of a corporate strategy. ... fancy label that means whatever the speaker or writer wants to say, which means that it doesn't mean anything at all. ... People who use the word synergy are really saying: "We have run out of sensible ideas and are chasing will-o'–the wisps, so we might as well try to hide that under some ultrasophisticated language"* '. It might be interesting to note that Geneen's career had its peak in nineteen sixties and seventies when conglomerates with their diversification strategies were very popular. However, more important is that Geneen and Bowers connect the success of a corporation to individual values and qualities of managers and possible added value of management concepts is disposed of as `baloney'.

Not only managers, but also management science generate a continuing critique on the stream of management concepts. One of the most beautiful examples from science is the book *`Management redeemed: debunking the Fads that undermine our Corporations'* written by Hilmer and Donaldson (1996). These gentlemen are *`mad as hell'*. There anger is aimed at two different groups. First of all, they focus on the ones who aim at managers and create dogma's, platitudes and fashion in stead of focussing on what they call `c*areful, sustained professional*' management. Second, they are angry because so many critical managers suddenly seem to put their critical minds overboard and are lullabied into sleep by believing these kinds of thoughts (pp. ix-x). Subsequently, they make a critical analysis of a number of recent `popular' management concepts and they end their book with a call for a more serious professionalisation of management in general. Most important is that `*... the essence of professional management is the skillful application of sound and proven ideas to the particular situations facing the manager – not dogma, jargon or quick-fix fads'* (pp. 172).

What did not add to the discussion is that the prestige of management as an occupational category boosted when Reagan, Thatcher and in the Netherlands Prime minister Lubbers gave priority to the market related forces in society. Management turned, after a long and deep recession, into an acceptable and even admirable career opportunity. Soon, it was discovered as a resourceful group of consumers. This led to a growing commercial interest in the knowledge market around management issues. However, the growing attention also made the profession an interesting target for shady consultants, authors and clowns who try to sell their tricks to the who ever is paying. The distinction between more and less serious contribution is, especially for new entrants not always clear. This phenomenon did not add to the reputation of the consultancy branch in the last decades and led to all kinds of scorn, mockery and critique. In an interview on this topic, a CEO focussed on the content of new management concepts and he claimed that we could quickly develop a new concept ourselves. *'If you* *and me would take some time and five, six terms and we would mix them and connect them, than we would have a new concept ourselves' .*

Another interviewee referred in this context to his irritations about all the success stories which are usually connected to new concepts and which are a thorn in his flesh. When the interviewer mentioned the ideas of Ricardo Semler who wrote a book on the SEMCO style, he reacted grumpy and said: '*Mythology, all corporate mythology. Do you really belief that that is what happened?'.*

It might be clear that both among scientists as managers themselves, the stream of fashionable management concepts often irritates and is perceived as `hot air'. And if one looks at the number of concepts and related publications, the idea of hot air might be true. There is chaff and wheat and the abundance makes it difficult for the new comers in the field to find their way. Although this is at times a problematic situation, it is probably even worse to turn our back to it completely. There are two reasons for this.

In the first place, the complete refutation of new management concepts as being hot air does not acknowledge the value they might have for many other people. Most important is the fact that the hot air hypothesis is rather popular among scientists who often evaluate only the quality of the content of management concepts with their own scientific quality standards. But using these criteria implies that they do not evaluate one important quality of the management concepts which contains added value and which scientific standards will not reveal. This idea is probably best described with the idea of *interpretative viability of a concept* (Ortmann 1995). This viability of a concept is the result of one of the main criticisms on concepts: their conceptual ambiguity. Due to the fact that management concepts are ambiguous, the user of a concept will have more possibilities in translating the concept to their own specific context and give their own meaning to it. So every manager, management team or organization translates the concept in their own way which finally leads to rather different consequences and results. As a result, BPR in one organization is not the same as BPR in another organization (Watts and Van Veen 1999). So it is necessary that a large number of interpretations and practices will emerge under the same label (Benders and Van Veen 2001). The interpretative viability of a concept might lead one person to conclude that is all hot air, while her neighbor is inspired by the idea and will use the ambiguity to use it in his own context in his own creative way.

In the second place, fashionable management concepts generate all kinds of new activities in the management community which are often used for totally different purposes as an outsider might think at first. An interviewed former CEO illustrated this in a very nice way when he was talking about his visit to a seminar of management guru Tom Peters for which he was invited by a manager firm another firm:

> *'You go there to pick something up. But don't forget, even if you think that the whole story is rubbish you learned something. So you are not only going there for the positive things. Deciding what you will not do is also a form of learning. And it is a good moment to meet your colleagues with whom you talk about various things, with whom you make some new appointments and with whom you share your experiences'.*

And with this last point, he stresses that there are other mechanisms in the management community to spread information and knowledge. As a result, the commercial activities offer all kinds of platforms at which colleagues and competitors meet in an informal atmosphere.

8. Fashionable management concepts redefined: explaining the dynamics in the collective knowledge base.

This overview shows that there are rather different views on the turmoil that management fashions create within the management community. Especially for the accumulation, the pendulum and the circulation view, some evidence can be found which shows the plausibility of the arguments in a certain context. And the simultaneous plausibility of the arguments leaves the outside observer puzzled about what is really going on in the collective knowledge base. In a few cases, this question might be answered by showing that the different views are not always mutually exclusive. A pendulum movement is possible with a circular movement of two concepts. One pushes the community to the right, the second pushes it to the left after which the first one is regenerated. However, this argument is mainly theoretical and empirically not easy to observe.

So how can we understand the presence of this different views? The answer lies in the context in which these views are expressed. It is the social structure of the management community that is necessary to explain the existence of these views. As I want to argue here, the dynamics in the collective knowledge base are strongly related to the social structural characteristics of the knowledge community in which they operate. The tensions between on the one hand the structure and processes within management as an occupational group, and on the other the epistomological claims about the dynamics in the collective knowledge base are the main source. Similar to what Kuhn did in '*The structure of scientific revolution'* (Burrell 1996 p.646), I will relate the social structure of the management community to the developments in the content of the body of knowledge. Implicitly, many of the arguments which will be used are already present in the foregoing description of the views. Here, I want to integrate these arguments into a theory which explains the dynamics in the social structure of the management community which are directly related to the dynamics within the collective knowledge base.

The essential assumption which can be traced beneath the discussion is the existence of a traceble body of knowledge around management issues to which new ideas can be added. This collective knowledge base is an essential characteristic of the management community and is implicitly seen in absolute terms. Hence, being a member of this management community implies that one masters this body of knowledge. Members are subsequently capable of applying these concepts within their local contexts. The management community is seen as a real profession with an articulate body of knowledge.

The professional status of the management as an occupational group[10] is something some managerial sub-groups like to defend. However, the acceptance of an occupational as a profession is also dependent on the legitimacy of their activities in the eyes of outsiders. All kinds of characteristics of professions are not present in the case of the management community. There are no entry barriers to the profession. It is only a job title, not a personal qualification. There are management training institutions such as Business Schools, but these are often not a prerequisite for entering certain corporate levels. There are also no tasks which are legally restricted to members of the profession. The claim to classify a management problem, to reason about it, and to take action on it is not the right of an organized occupational group (Abbott 1988 p.40), but is the task of a subgroup in organizations which accessible to all. In fact, the management community is highly heterogenous occupational category with an essentially undefined body of knowledge. Management might be a recognized occupational category from the outside, internally it is highly differentiated and has only taken a few first minor steps in the direction of the establishment of a real profession.

This conclusion opens new ways of interpreting the four different views. First of all, the hot air argument against fashionable concepts is basically a demarcation problem within the management community. Who is accepted as a good manager and what do you need to know or do to be one? For instance by Geneen, the added value of concepts is questioned based on the idea that common sense, and not `scientific' knowledge is sufficient for being a good manager. The existence of a set of managerial concepts is seen as something which can not add to on-the-job training and personal qualities and moral inclinations. Others, such as Hilmer and Donaldson, do acknowledge the existence of a body of knowledge, but exclude fashionable concepts from this body. In essence, they conclude the same thing around the management concepts, but they are probably the most fervent supporters of the idea of a collective body of knowledge. Mastering this knowledge is, according to them, a prerequisite for being a good manager and education is an important aspect of management development.

The other three - the accumulation, pendulum and circularity views - also acknowledge the existence of some kind of body of knowledge which helps managers perform better in their jobs. The issue underlying these views is not only the epistemological question if a concept adds to the collective knowledge base. It is the problem of distribution of this knowledge within the community which determines most of the discussion. It is not the absolute added value of fashionable concepts on a collective level which is so interesting. It is the relative added value of concepts that creates large parts of their popularity and is the source of the coexistence of different views. This is exactly what we saw earlier in the context of the circularity wine in new bottles argument. Young managers do not learn and are usually not expected to master the existing body of knowledge around managerial issues. Fashionable concepts are a mean to regenerate old ideas. These concepts might be a very good way to keep knowledge alive in a occupational group that is mainly focussed on direct results in the near future and not on the historical backgrounds of its own legitimacy.

Three dimensions of the hetrogeneity of the management community are relevant in this respect. First of all, there is heterogeneity in terms of management tenure. Younger managers react differently than older managers due to their lack of knowledge about management concepts and their lack of experience. Their lack of knowledge about management concepts makes that new concepts look really new. But it is their first encounter with much of these concepts and theories. So the question remains if it are the specific features of a new concepts what makes them enthousiastic, or their introduction to the basic management language which is often also part of these concepts. Older managers have more knowledge in this respect and will, as a result, react much more to the claimed `newness' of a concept. Scepticism is probably an age related phenomenon. Besides knowledge, there is a dimension of experience which plays a role. Older managers have probably seen more variety in issues due to the longer exposure to the management context. As a result, they might be more aware of different options which makes them more critical to fashionable concepts. Additionally, they have developed their own approach to management and might be less willing to follow the arguments of others in this respect. Finally, there is fragmentation of the management community based on the content of the management task. Different sectors within an economy will generate different management issues. As a result, some of the concepts which focuss on an issue will be more interesting for one subgroup than for the others. For managers in the auto-industry, a concept such as Lean Production might be very interesting. However, for managers in the government, this might not relate to their daily experience and will not be interesting at all.

This heterogeneity of the management community creates a situation in which the demand for concepts varies. Each manager will evaluate new concepts based on local added value. If a new concept fits with the own knowledge and the local context, adoption will be likely. Depending on the characteristics of the demand side, the concept will be adopted widely or not, so will be more or less fashionable. In such a situation, it is easy to understand that concepts which introduce a novelty will have a large market and will have a high chance of becoming fashionable. Concepts that are caught in the rithm of a pendulum, will be pushed due to the result that older managers retire and new managers are not aware of the historical backgrounds of the new concepts. If knowledge is not handed over to next generations of managers, dynamics in the collective knowledge base such as the pendulum are likely to emerge. And the old-wine-in-new-bottles is clearly a dynamic that is related to the personal background of a manager. Again, retiring generations will create room in the collective knowledge base for re-launching earlier concepts with a new label.

The management community is basically an occupational category and is far from a profession. The community lacks a clearly described body of knowledge and has hardly any mechanisms to transfer the existing management concepts to new generations. If these characteristics are combined with a heterogeneity of the management community, a situation emerges in which there is permanent flux in the demand for new and existing management concepts. As a result we can see a dynamic collective knowledge base in which fashions are a common phenomenon and in which different views on these fashions can emerge. However, the real value of a management concept should not measured against an unclear body of knowledge but can be traced to the relative added value in the local management context.

9. Discussion.

Overlooking the ins and outs of the four views on the permanant impermanence of management concepts, it turns out that the debate around the added value of management concepts is more complicated than one would expect at first. The implicit discourse seems to be dominated by four views. The foregoing analysis shows that these one dimensional propositions are rather simplistic and do not acknowledge which role management concepts might play within the collective knowledge base around management issues. By sticking to one kind of point of view, two things are overlooked rather easily. First, a closer look shows that there is some validity in each of the points of view. Especially for the accumulation, the pendulum and the circular view, some good arguments can be found. The no movements or hot-air view is more doubtful, but this is due to the fact that the arguments do not generate an idea about the dynamics in the collective knowledge base, but more about the demarcation. The hot-air hypothesis is more a suggestion about a dichotomy of the knowledge base in order to create a distinction between real and suggested but fake knowledge on management issues. A closer analysis shows that its supporters are overlooking the potential added value for other people due to the interpretative viability which is necessary for the local use of concepts. So in specific situations, even hot-air might have some added value.

Second, the different points of view are not mutually exclusive. It is not difficult to see that the pendulum can be easily combined with old-wine-in-new-bottles. And it won’t be strange to see that concept with some added value is discussed with examples which are close to hot-air and which in essence do not justify the general message of the new concept. The proposition that it is old-wine-in-new-bottles can be traced in different kinds of media, but here again, we need to make some comments. It seems that the defenders of one of the propositions gracefully surpass the complexity of the underlying discussion.

The conclusion that the different points of view are each defendable and not mutually exclusive creates a situation in which the usual one-sided claims about the added value of management concepts are not very interesting. It is much more interesting to know who is trying to make that specific point and why (s)he chooses this.

The consequence of this one-sidedness might have a adverse effect, especially for the negative ones. The stream of management concepts might be seen as a mechanism to distribute new knowledge within the management community, or, and equally important, to regenerate existing knowledge. The lack of generally acknowledged, standardized and codified knowledge on management issues makes that there is hardly a mechanism which can be used to transfer existing insights to new generations of managers. Management concepts might fill this gap due to the fact that the existing knowledge is permanently redistributed through the management community. And the kind of remark a person makes about a new concept tells us more about this person self, than about the real added value of a management concept for the collective knowledge base. Old-wine-in-new bottles? Yes, for you maybe …

If there is any added value in management concepts, it has to be found in the local context of use and not directly in the absolute added value in the total collective knowledge base. Especially the person who takes notice from a new management concept is important for the final evaluation. The value of a concept in a specific context is largely dependent on the kind of knowledge which is already present in this specific context.

This becomes even more relevant when we realize that a lot of concepts are often hard to apply in a concrete sense. Often, the added value of a concept is more dependent on the creative translation of the concept to the own specific context, that on precise content of the concept itself. And especially in the creative translation and practical execution, many difficult bumps can be found. Earlier in this article we already cited Hammer and Champy wrote: *Reengineering is not a fad, because it works. Properly applied it delivers what it promises*' (1995 pp.215-216). The individual qualities of managers, consultants and employees and especially their mutual relations that determine the application and which are much more important than the precise content of a specific concept. Concepts can be easily abused for private goals or to solve internal tensions within management teams. However, the consequences of the use of a concept in such a context, that is something you can't blame the concept for … .

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[11] An earlier version of this article was a chapter in: ‘Managementconcepten in beweging: tussen feit en vluchtigheid’ by Luchien Karsten and Kees van Veen (1998). Subsequently, the arguments were further elaborated and published in M&O, a Dutch management journal. The same text was also published in a book with the title `*Managementadvies: wat is dat*’ by L.de Caluwé and A. Witteveen. I would like to thank David Gibson, Luchien Karsten, Arndt Sorge and Aernoud Witteveen for their stimulating comments on drafts in different stages of the project.

[2] According to the Index Translationum of the Unesco. Thanks to Harmen Sikkenga for finding this information.

[3] Pascale’s book is problematic due to the fact that it contains a number of methodological uncertainties. Based on the texts, his analysis are not reproducable. Even worse, changes have been made in his measurement instruments which unknown effects on the figure make it not easy to interpret their precise meaning. However, others have reproduced similar figures which make the statements of Pascale rather plausible (see for example Heusinkveld and Benders 2000).

[4] Besides the classical quality concepts such as Quality control circles, Statistical Process Control, Continuous Improvement and ISO 9000, Cole also uses Benchmarking and Business Process Reengineering in his lists of concepts. His definition of quality is rather broad, to say the least.

[5] Biggart and Guillén (1999) show in their interesting analysis that this norm is context-specific and that it depends on the context if this is a feasible idea.

[6] Het Financieele Dagblad, December 11th 2001.

[7] Hamel and Prahalad mention a number of other `these-antithese’ extremes of which I will discuss a few here. The ones I do not pay attention to are *Corporate* versus *Business units*, *centralized* versus *decentralized*, *bureaucratic* versus *empowered*, *clones* versus *renegades and technology-led* versus *customer-led*.

[8] In close cooperation with McKinsey, Shell started in 1959 (!) a reorientation that started as a mixture structure and evolved into a matrix. With thanks to Frits Kool to point his out.

[9] In this article, I leave other valuable aspects of management concepts - such as their potential in organizational change processes - for what they are.

[10] This piece is inspired by the work of Abbott 1988.